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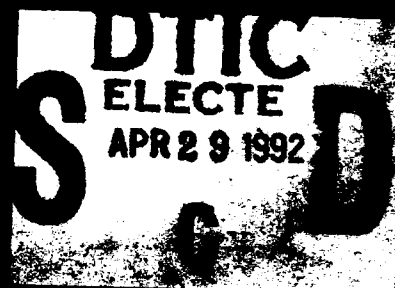
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**THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY:  
DOCUMENTING STRATEGIC VISION**

Don M. Snider

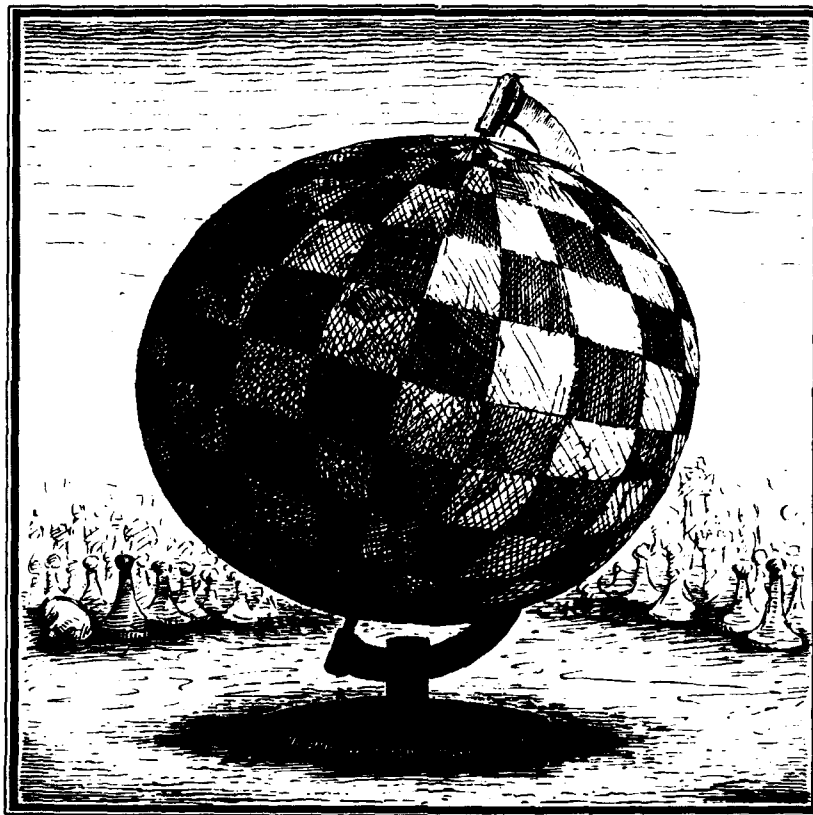


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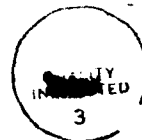
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**Don M. Snider**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## FOREWORD

The Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act requires the President to submit an annual report on the National Security Strategy. In theory, a formal presentation of grand strategy was intended to lend coherence to the budgeting process; a clear statement of interests, objectives, and concepts for achieving them gave Congress a clear idea of the resources required to support the President's strategy. The problem with such documents is that they often create the false impression that strategy formulation is a rational and systemic process. In fact, strategy formulation both within the executive branch and between the executive branch and Congress is an intensely political process from which national strategy emerges after protracted bargaining and compromise. Key personalities do what they can agree to do.

Don Snider, as an Army colonel, participated in this process at the National Security Council, and prepared the 1988 *Report on National Security Strategy*. This study is his account of the strategy formulation process as viewed from the White House.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to publish this study as part of its ongoing efforts to disseminate the substance and process of national strategy and supporting military strategy.



KARL W. ROBINSON  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR**

DON M. SNIDER is Deputy Director, Political Military Studies, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He joined the Center in March 1990 when retired from active duty with the U.S. Army. Since 1980 he had specialized in assignments related to military strategy and defense policy, serving consecutively as Chief of Plans for the Theater Army in Europe; Joint Planner for the Army Chief of Staff; Deputy Director of Strategy, Plans and Policy on the Army General Staff; and Federal Executive Fellow at the Brookings Institution. He then joined the staff of the National Security Council in the White House in 1987 as Director, Defense Policy, serving in both the Reagan and Bush Administrations. Within the Center, he specializes in national security strategy, defense policy and programs, military strategy, and European security issues. His publications include: a CSIS Panel Report, "A New Military Strategy for the 1990s: Implications for Capabilities and Acquisition," and "The Gulf War: Military Lessons Learned."

# **THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: DOCUMENTING STRATEGIC VISION**

## **Introduction.**

### **SEC. 603. ANNUAL REPORT ON NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY**

...Sec. 104. (a)(1) The President shall transmit to Congress each year a comprehensive report on the national security strategy of the United States...

(2) The national security strategy report for any year shall be transmitted on the date on which the President submits to Congress the budget for the next fiscal year under section 1105 of title 31, United States Code.

(b) Each national security strategy report shall set forth the national security strategy of the United States and shall include a comprehensive description and discussion of the following:

(1) The worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the United States that are vital to the national security of the United States.

(2) The foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities of the United States necessary to deter aggression and to implement the national security strategy of the United States.

(3) The proposed short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of national power of the United States to protect or promote the interests and achieve the goals and objectives referred to in paragraph (1).

(4) The adequacy of the capabilities of the United States to carry out the national security strategy of the United States, including an evaluation of the balance among the capabilities of all elements of national power of the United States to support the implementation of the national security strategy.



(5) Such other measures as may be helpful to inform Congress on matters relating to the national security strategy of the United States.

(c) Each national security strategy report shall be transmitted in both a classified and an unclassified form.<sup>1</sup>

By the above language, a small section of a much larger reform package known as the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, the Congress amended the National Security Act of 1947 to require annually a written articulation of grand strategy from each succeeding President. In so doing, Congress was attempting to legislate a solution to what it, and many observers, believed to be a legitimate and significant problem of long-standing in our governmental processes—an inability within the executive branch to formulate, in an coherent and integrated manner, judiciously using resources drawn from all elements of national power, the mid- and long-term strategy necessary to defend and further those interests vital to the nation's security.

Few in the Congress at that time doubted that there existed a grand strategy, the nation had been following "containment" in one form or another for over 40 years. What they doubted, or disagreed with, was its *focus* in terms of values, interests and objectives; its *coherence* in terms of relating means to ends; its *integration* in terms of the elements of power; and its *time* horizon. In theory, at least to the reformers, a clearly written strategy would serve to inform the Congress better on the needs for resources to execute the strategy, thus facilitating the annual authorization and appropriation processes, particularly for the Department of Defense.

There have now been four such reports published, two during the second Reagan Administration (1987 and 1988), and two by the Bush Administration (1990 and 1991). This paper, written by the individual responsible for the preparation of the 1988 report and in coordination with the official responsible for the 1990 and 1991 reports,<sup>2</sup> draws on their experiences to provide insights into the process as well as the individual products.

## **The Political Context.**

Before discussing the individual reports, we must understand the context in which these reports are produced. First, it was understood that the requirement for the report did not originate solely, or even mainly, from within the Congress. In fact, the Congress was, at that time, much more interested in reforming the Department of Defense; what was reformed east of the Potomac was of much less interest.<sup>3</sup>

Like most pieces of legislation, the idea for a Presidential statement of grand strategy had been percolating for several years in many locations—in think tanks, from public-minded citizens, from former government officials, from professional associations, from the academic literature, and from specific interest groups formed for the express purpose of fostering the requirement for such a report. As expected from an open, pluralistic process, each proponent had its own purposes for desiring such a statement, resulting in differing expectations of what the structure, content and use of the final report would be. In retrospect, it is clear that inclusion of the requirement for such a report in the final Goldwater-Nichols bill followed one of the better known maxims of the policy community—if we can agree on what we want, let's not try to agree on why we want it.

Secondly, in this particular topic there is always the issue of imprecise language. Just what is national security strategy, as opposed to grand strategy, or defense strategy, or even national military strategy? And what are the distinguishable elements of power of the United States, and the boundaries between? How can national security strategy subsume foreign policy as the Act seems to imply by its language? Obviously, there was, and is, no real consensus on this language either in academia, where the public servants in Washington earlier took their training, or in Washington where they practice their arts.

But, as we all know, language does make a difference, particularly within the executive branch where authorities and responsibilities represent power. Even more so, within the interagency arena, where responsibilities for the preparation

for this particular report were viewed as direct access to the President's overall agenda, and thus highly desirable, there initially existed little consensus as to the components of a national security strategy and what represented coherence. This imprecision in the language of the strategic art compounded the problem even among those who wanted a quality product.

The flip side of this positive, "I want to be part of the process," view was the recognition within the executive branch that this was not the only, or the principal, or even the most desirable means for the President to articulate his strategic vision. What President in a fast-paced, media oriented world wants to articulate, in a static, written report once a year a detailed statement of his forward-looking strategic vision? If ever there was a surefire means of insuring that your boss would be "hoisted on his own petard," this was it to many of the President's closest political advisors. To influence resource allocations it was considered far better to report mushy "globaloney" to Congress in written form, and to depend instead on current, personal testimonies by administration officials before the Committees, supported by Presidential speeches as part of a coherent and wide-spread campaign of public diplomacy to the electorate of America.

The writer must also provide, for context, a feel for the political atmosphere within which the early reports were prepared. My tenure on the staff of the National Security Council began just after the Iran-Contra fiasco and during the implementation of the Tower Commission recommendations.<sup>4</sup> To say that White House/congressional relations were at absolute gridlock would be true, but would also vastly understate the passion, hostile intensity, and hyper-legalistic approach being taken by both sides on most every item of the mutual agenda. Whether it be war powers, strategic modernization, strategic defenses, or regional foreign and defense policies, there was a pervasive *modus vivendi* of little quarter being asked, and only rarely any given.

The tasks before Ambassador Carlucci, General Powell and other early rebuilders of the NSC process were therefore appropriately focused on rebuilding trust and confidence, and

on getting the wheels of Government moving again on pressing issues of current policy and their implementation. Recruiting for and reorganizing the NSC staff and its supervision of interagency processes implemented this effort, consuming significant organizational energy. Further, the requirement for the strategy report was not legislated until the fall of 1986, leaving little time for the preparation of the initial submission. Therefore, a conscious decision was made that the initial report would document "where we are, strategically" in a comprehensive way, but not go beyond that point. Further, no classified version would be prepared.

Finally, given the existing political context described above, it is clear that the first task facing one responsible to prepare such a report is to determine from the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (APNSA), or better from the President directly, just what the purpose of the document really is. What it is not is a neutral, strategic planning document, though many academics and even some in government would prefer it to be. Rather it was to serve five primary functions.

First, it was agreed that the primary, external purpose of the report was to communicate strategic vision to Congress, and thus legitimate a rationale for resources. Second, it was to communicate the same vision to a number of other quite different constituencies. Some of these were foreign, and extensive distributions through the United States Information Agency subsequently proved most effective at communicating changing U.S. intentions to the governments of many nations not on our summit agendas. Third, other audiences were domestic, often political supporters of the President who wanted to see their particular issue prominently displayed under Presidential signature; others, more public-minded, wanted to see coherence and farsightedness in the security policies of their government.

Fourth, there was the internal constituency of those in the executive branch to whom the process of creating the document was recognized from the beginning to be of immense substantive value. It is simply impossible to document a strategy where none exists! It became clear that

few things educate political appointees faster as to their own strategic sensings, or to the qualities and competencies of the "permanent" government in the executive bureaucracies they lead, than to have to commit in writing to the President their agency's plans for the future and how they are to be integrated, coordinated and otherwise shared with other agencies and departments. The ability to forge consensus on direction, priorities and pace, getting important players down three political levels "on board," was recognized early as an invaluable, if not totally daunting, opportunity.

And lastly, any Presidential document, regardless of originating requirement, was always viewed in the context of how it contributed to the overall presentation of the President's agenda. Unfortunately, Congress unwittingly insured that the document would usually be submitted in a low-profile manner since it is required early in January with the budget submission—just before one of the President's premier communication events of the year, the State of the Union address. Well coordinated, the two activities can be mutually supportive, but more normal to date is, appropriately, the dominance of the State of the Union address.

Thus, with these five purposes in mind, all legitimate and necessary but understood to be almost a zero-sum game in their completion, one set out in the name of the President to task the Cabinet officials and their strategy-minded lieutenants to articulate the preferred national security strategy for the United States. What followed was an iterative, interagency process of some months, culminating in multiple drafts and several high level meetings, including the NSC, to resolve differences or approve the final document.

### **The 1988 National Security Strategy Report.**

As noted earlier, the 1987 report was prepared in a very limited period of time and reflected the intent to document current strategic thinking. In its two major sections, one each on foreign policy and defense policy, the document reflected the strong orientation toward Cabinet government, and the strong emphasis on military instruments of power, almost to

the exclusion of the others. The section on integrating elements of power referred to the NSC system as the integrator, rather than documenting current strategies toward nations or regions. Of course the document taken as a whole portrayed a comprehensive strategic approach toward the Soviet Union. The NSC system in the Reagan Administrations had produced by then over 250 classified national security decision directives (NSDD). These represented at any point a set of substrategies "effective in promoting the integrated employment of the broad and diverse range of tools available for achieving our national security objectives."<sup>5</sup>

Two major changes from the 1987 format were introduced in the 1988 report. With twin deficits and trade issues prominent on the domestic agenda, the first change was to emphasize all the elements of national power, particularly the economic element which scarcely had been discussed in the previous report. This logically led to the second adjustment, which was to present explicitly strategies for the integration of the various instruments of power at the regional level. Both efforts probably rate an A for idea and effort and no more than a C for results as seen on the printed page. Behind the printed page, however, I am confident that those who participated in this interagency process are much more inclined to appreciate and to seek a coordinated approach to current and future policy toward a region or subregion.

### **The 1990 National Security Strategy Report.**

The 1990 report was prepared in a vortex of global change. The Bush Administration began with a detailed interagency review of security strategy in the spring of 1989. This effort—and the natural turbulence of a new administration shaking out its personnel and procedures, notably the Tower nomination—had pushed the preparation of the 1989 report into the early fall. Then, events in Eastern Europe made sections of the draft prose, if not the underlying policy, obsolete. The original legislation had implicitly assumed a fairly steady state in the international environment, with the annual report articulating incremental changes to both our perceptions of and responses to that environment. The pace of change

throughout the last half of 1989 pushed the publication of the next report into March 1990.

In content the 1990 report attempted to embrace fully the reality of change in the Soviet Union and, especially, in Eastern Europe. The response to that change as discussed in the report, however, was admittedly cautious. At least one critic described the document as schizophrenic, with the reading of the environment in the front at significant variance with the prescribed response in the back. This demonstrates once again how much easier it is in a rather open, pluralistic process to gain consensus on what is being observed, as opposed to how we should respond to that observed change. The process in 1989-90 did show, however, the potential of the document to force assessments of events and developments that might otherwise have been avoided.

#### **The 1991 National Security Strategy Report.**

The quickening pace of world change—and a deepening crisis and, ultimately, war in the Middle East—also served to delay the 1991 report. Key decision makers focused on multiple, demanding developments. After August 2, at least, the foreground was taken by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, coalition building and military action. In the background, and occasionally intruding to the fore, were fundamental changes in the U.S.-Soviet relationship, major treaties on strategic and conventional weaponry, and the final dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. There was little room in anyone's focus, particularly within the NSC staff, to develop, coordinate and publish a comprehensive and definitive Presidential statement of strategy. Although its major elements had been drafted by February, the 1991 report was not published until August.

Like its predecessors, events forced the focus of the 1991 report to the U.S.-Soviet relationship as the departure point for any discussion of American strategy. More than preceding reports, however, this one attempted to broaden the definition of national security. In purely military terms, it proclaimed regional conflict as the organizing principle for American military forces, and suggested that new terms of reference for

nuclear deterrence would shortly be needed. Politically, it attempted to turn the compass on arms control from east-west to north-south for a much expanded discussion of policy to retard proliferation. Even more than the previous reports, the document attempted to communicate the idea that American economic well-being was included in the definition of national security, even though discussions of specific programs to improve competitiveness or to combat trade and budget deficits were generally lacking.

### **Conclusions.**

Several conclusions can be drawn from these experiences, conclusions of process and substance that, perhaps, are arrived at uniquely from the NSC perspective.

The first conclusion is obvious from the earlier discussions, but so deeply pervades all else that I want to state it explicitly—there is no real consensus today as to the appropriate grand strategy for the United States. And, more importantly, this lack of consensus is due far less to any type of constraint on strategic thinking *than it is to the fundamental value differences in our electorate, and the resulting legacy of federal government divided institutionally between the political parties.* It is easy to agree with those academics concerned that the current dysfunctions of "divided government" increasingly preclude coherent strategic behavior on the part of our nation.<sup>6</sup>

After all, grand strategy is really the idea of allocating resources to create in both the short and long term various instruments of power, instruments with which the nation then provides for its defense and the furtherance of its aims in the world. True, there have been extraordinary changes in the external environment, and we won the cold war. But to many, including those working to formulate security strategy through this period of intense change, the erosion of consensus was apparent far earlier. One need look no further than the foreign and economic assistance allocations from roughly 1984 onward, or the endless clashes on strategic modernization or defenses, or the constant tug of war on war powers and treaty



obligations, or the Reagan Administrations attempts to buttress aggressive unilateralism. And, as Iran-Contra showed to all during this period, without a modicum of consensus there can be no effective security strategy or policy.

This conclusion is stated first because it conditions those that follow, and because it conditions one's expectations for the specific mode of formulating national security strategy that is discussed in this paper. A Presidential strategy report can never be more than it really is, a statement of preference from the executive branch as to current, and perhaps future, grand strategy. Given our divided government, it remains for a constructively adversarial process with the Congress to refine that preferential strategy into one that has any chance of being effective—one around which there can be created domestic political consensus, and thus an allocation of resources effective in creating instruments of national power.

The second conclusion focuses on the function of long-range planning, or strategic planning, which is the base from which security strategy formulation must be built. Simply stated, in my experience the executive branch of government does not do long-range planning in a substantive or systematic manner. (I make a sharp distinction between planning and programming.) To be sure, there are pockets of planning activity within the "permanent" government of many departments and agencies, particularly Defense and State. Some of this is good, comprehensive planning from the perspective of that particular agency. But it is devoid of the political dynamic which can be provided only by the participation of those who have won elections, which under our system of government provides the authority to set future directions and pace in security policy and strategy. Taken in the whole then, particularly given the number of departments and agencies within which there is little planning activity, I am comfortable stating this conclusion in the stark form.

This phenomena of a paucity of strategic planning is well documented in academic writings, particularly the memoirs of former officials. And, the causes are well known to political scientists.<sup>7</sup> In my own experience, two causes stand out. The first is the limit of what is physically possible for elected officials

to do in any given amount of time. Long-range planning and strategy formulation will always run a poor second to the pressing combination of crisis management and near-term policy planning and implementation. There is seldom a week that the NSC staff and the planning staffs of the principal Cabinet officers are not *fully* involved in either preparation for or clean-up after a trip, or summit, or focused negotiation. And this is as it should be; the maxim is true in diplomatic and political activity at this level that if today is not cared for, tomorrow will not arrive in a manageable form. Secondly, the pernicious effects of divided government, manifest in micromanaging and punitive legislation on the one hand and intractable stonewalling and relentless drives for efficiency on the other, preclude resources for permanent, long-range planning staffs.

In place of a systematic approach to long-range or strategic planning, what the executive branch does do, and in some cases rather well, is episodic planning for particular events. This is how one can describe the creation of each of the strategy reports—a focused, comprehensive effort of some 2-3 months involving political leadership and their permanent bureaucracies in the development of common vision and purpose for the near-term future. The often cited NSC-68 and PRM-10 reviews are historic examples of other successful, but episodic, strategic planning events.<sup>8</sup> A more recent example is the Ikle-Wohlstetter Commission of 1988.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, in most cases these were incremental responses to a rather consistent external security environment, made by administrations, often new, that were stewards of a consensus U.S. grand strategy. But the fact remains, these episodic events did produce in-depth reviews across the range of interests and instruments of national power, and resulted in much more than rhetorical change to the overall strategy.

The relevant question now, it seems to me, given the inherent constraints to systematic, long-range planning noted above, is whether it is wise in the future to attempt anything more than broad, but episodic, planning exercises for the formulation of grand strategy. More specifically, should the executive attempt a new statement of grand strategy every

year? My own experience, reinforced by the above historical examples, leads me to conclude that comprehensive strategy reviews should only be executed twice during an administration's tenure, during the first and third years to be presented early to each session of the Congress. Further, if the pace of change in external events subsides, a valid case could probably be made to conduct such a review only once, during the first year of a new administration.

While the adoption of comprehensive strategy reviews at set intervals would address one problem with the coherent formulation of strategy, a much more formidable constraint also is apparent from experiences, which is offered as a third conclusion--the executive branch is not well organized to accommodate the changing metrics of national power,<sup>10</sup> particularly the reascendancy of economic power in the formulation and execution of future U.S. grand strategy.<sup>11</sup>

This problem does not stem from a failure to recognize and treat the economic element of power for what it is, the long-term strength underpinning the other elements of power.<sup>12</sup> Rather it stems from a failure to agree on the appropriate policies at the federal level to preserve that essential power. Toward the end of the cold war, this failure was manifest in several forms, notably the political inability to deal effectively with the twin deficits of the 1980s. They still are not addressed in a seriously compelling manner early in the 1990s. Volumes have been written pinning the blame on both the Executive and the Congress; but it appears there is quite enough for both as neither has led the electorate to understand the severity of the issues or otherwise to forge consensus for resolution.

A second major contributor to the failure is the complexity of recent arrangements for making economic policy. At least four cabinet officials have a significant role (Treasury, State, Defense, Commerce), and integrating responsibilities rest with three agencies within the Executive Office of the President (Economic Policy Council, National Security Council, Domestic Policy Council). Advice comes from two more (Office of Management and Budget, Council of Economic Advisors). The integrated, coordinated use of economic instruments of

power, particularly in the context of regional security strategies, is understandably difficult to achieve in this organizational environment.

Beyond the problems of finding time to work on strategy and finding someone to be in charge of economic policy, I conclude that there is another shortcoming of a different nature in the current process. The art of formulating strategy is that of combining the various elements of power and relating them to the desired end—the key is integration. This belief is derived as much from experience in crisis management as in strategy formulation. Too often, after a crisis was ongoing it was clear that there had been little prior coordination or integration of policy instruments focused on a particular region or country before the crisis. Too often the only effective instruments for immediate leverage were military. In retrospect it was clear that if we had been pursuing a well-documented and integrated strategic approach toward the region or country in question, one in which the current policy instruments drew from all elements of power, the ability for more effective response would have been greatly enhanced.

Increasingly in this post-cold war era, those ends toward which we are developing a strategic approach are being defined at the regional and subregional level. Even strategies for such transnational issues as terrorism and narcotics trafficking focus at the subregional level for implementation, as do many strategies for the use of economic power. But planning for the effective integration of policy instruments for the various regions and subregions remains problematic.

Lastly, I conclude, contrary to some of what is contained in this paper, that we should not concentrate exclusively on institutions and processes when discussing the development of national security strategy. As I have seen so often, it is people who really define the character of the institutions and who make the processes what they are. Almost uniformly I have observed people of intelligence and goodwill respond to the need to place national interests above those of organization or person. This is not to conclude, however, that all is well and we can count on such people consistently overcoming the real constraints on strategic thinking and

behavior in our government. But it is to conclude that it is much too early for a cynical approach to the strategic reformulation the nation is now transiting.

2

## ENDNOTES

1. 50 U.S.C. 402, (Title I of the National Security Act of 1947).

2. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Colonel Michael Hayden, USAF, in providing insights on the preparation of the 1990 and 1991 reports. All judgments in this paper remain, of course, solely the responsibility of the author.

3. Even though much of the reform literature, such as the 1985 Report of the Senate Armed Services Committee, "Organization of the Department of Defense—The Need for Change," discusses needed reforms in both the executive and congressional branches, Congress chose only to pursue reform within DOD. Since Congress was not reforming itself, it was not in a position to lean directly on the Executive Office of the President for reforms.

4. *Report of the President's Special Review Board*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987, also available as *The Tower Commission Report* by several publishers. Of particular interest to the context of this paper are Part II, "Organizing for National Security," and Part V, "Recommendations."

5. *National Security Strategy of the United States*, January 1987, p. 40.

6. For example, see Aaron Friedberg, "Is the United States Capable of Acting Strategically?," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Winter 1991, pp. 15-20.

7. David C. Kozak, "The Bureaucratic Politics Approach: The Evolution of the Paradigm," *Bureaucratic Politics and National Security*, David Kozak and James Keagle, eds., Rienner Publishers, 1988, pp. 3-15.

8. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 89-127, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, McGraw Hill, 1983, pp. 51-52.

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